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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Russia-Ukraine Energy
Conflict Bush Administration - Domestic and Foreign Policies
Under Fire
PARIS - Wednesday, January 04, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Russia-Ukraine Energy Conflict
Bush Administration - Domestic and Foreign Policies Under Fire

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Domestic issues dominate most of today's front pages, except for Liberation which devotes its front page to the George Clooney film "Good Night and Good Luck" and headlines: "George Against Bush." The editorial sees the film as a parable of the present situation between the Bush administration and the media, "even if Clooney is not Morrow." (See Part C)

A number of inside stories in Le Figaro are devoted to the political situation in Washington: the trial of Jack Abramoff is reported as "the trial of the lobby industry" while controversy about Mexican illegal aliens and the new immigration bill serves to portray a new trend in the U.S. "which fears for its identity." La Croix portrays Senator Arlen Specter, "a moderate and influential Republican" whose position on the White House eavesdropping controversy reveals a man "who, freed from electoral ambitions is also free to speak his mind." (See Part C)

Communist l'Humanite devotes two pages to "The American Model in Crisis in the Middle East." Pierre Barbancey retraces the spots where war and conflicts are smoldering, "from Jerusalem to Kabul." (See Part C) He interviews Pascal Boniface on the Greater Middle East Initiative and the war in Iraq: "The Americans have chosen the policy of a major kick in the anthill, including through war. The results of the war in Iraq are largely negative. Those who oppose this policy believe that a democratic movement can be supported from the outside, but that the movement itself must be the fruit of an internal process." Popular right-of-center France Soir devotes two full inside pages to: "The Middle East Waits for War." Thomas de Rochechouart analyzes the context of the Israeli and Palestinian elections and concludes: "It would seem that the Middle East is at a crossroads. Peace has never appeared to be so close. A general conflict as well."

While many articles continue to describe the energy situation triggered by Putin, Le Figaro is the only editorial still commenting on Europe's dependency and the need to diversify its energy sources. The editorial is entitled "Gas, the Atom and Dependency." (See Part C)

The editorial in centrist La Tribune, entitled "With Equal Weapons" is devoted to Airbus and Boeing's record sales in 2005. "The Old Continent versus the New Continent, the battle is far from new. What is delightful is to see that in this particular sector, the battle is waged with equal weapons."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Russia-Ukraine Energy Conflict

"Gas, the Atom and Dependency"

Nicolas Barre in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/04): "Europe's dependency on its Russian gas supplier is very worrisome. With its attitude towards Ukraine, Russia has just confirmed to all of Europe that it intends using energy as a political weapon. Today Ukraine, and tomorrow whose turn? In the past, Putin's Russia, like Brejnev's USSR, always honored its contracts. It was in its best interest. But Moscow's forceful stance with Kiev changes everything. Even if Putin is doing all he can to reassure Europe and give all possible guarantees that the energy supply levels will go back to normal, insecurity in the supply of energy for an entire continent has been revealed. If Europe were to abandon nuclear energy, it would mean that one third of its electricity would have to come from conventional sources such as oil and gas. Is this a realistic approach, when the geo-strategic situation of the world has been upset since 9/11, when both Europe and the U.S. have been subjected

to power cuts and when China is absorbing the world's entire fossil energy production? After the U.S., which has gone back to commercial nuclear programs, Europe is, in light of the Russian gas crisis, rediscovering the merits of atomic energy, first revealed during the oil crises of the 70s."

Bush Administration - Domestic and Foreign Policies Under Fire

"A Parable"

Patrick Sabatier in left-of-center Liberation (01/04):

"McCarthyism remains in the U.S. a code name serving to warn against the dangers that lurk in a democracy when that democracy goes to war: sacrificing freedom and principles in the name of national security. In 2006, the war, unlike in 1954, is sporadic, the enemy is Islamic. And the President emulates McCarthy, at least for the most liberal Americans. Clooney's film is therefore like an anti-Bush parable. While some might say the comparison is exaggerated, it is not entirely false. The President is being accused, not without reason, of having transgressed certain rights inscribed in the Constitution, such as allowing illegal and clandestine eavesdropping, renditions and the torture of suspects, all in the name of national security and the war against terror."

"Arlen Specter, Bush and Eavesdropping"

Gilles Biassette in Catholic La Croix (01/04): "The controversy over authorized eavesdropping by the Bush administration in connection with the war on terror is eliciting questions within the President's own party. The defense adopted by the White House is considered insufficient by important individuals in the Republican Party. Arlen Specter is among those who do not like seeing the State infringing on private citizens' rights. Specter is an influential Senator, who will probably be heard often during the next few months: he embodies the moderate arm of the party, which was reduced to silence out of solidarity with the White House after the attacks on 9/11, but which could start to raise its voice again. Specter, who has no electoral ambitions is totally free to speak up and can expect to elicit the ire of the White House."

"The Lobbying Industry in Shock"

Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro (01/04): "The fall of Jack Abramoff is threatening major Congressional figures as well as the entire lobbying world over which he reigned. The scandal is tarnishing America's entire political class. Lobbies have traditionally operated in the open to represent the legitimate interests of the American public or of industrial and economic sectors in order to draft appropriate laws. Unfortunately, at times, personal relations have taken over the debate. The ethic rules defined by Congress are often easily by-passed. With the mid-term elections in view, there is the possibility of a major clean up: according to an AP-Ispos poll, 65 percent of Americans have a negative image of Congress."

"From Jerusalem to Kabul, Crises and More Crises"

Pierre Barbancey in communist L'Humanite (01/04): "President Bush's first words of 2006 in favor of peace are a far cry from the triumphant proclamations that accompanied the launching of the Great Middle East Initiative. This is because since then, events have proven how inept a plan it is. An overview of the region is enough to prove that regional tensions, far from having been reduced, have instead been reignited by the Bush administration's policies: the situation has never been so tense between Lebanon and Syria; in Afghanistan, Karzai's power is all but stable; in Iraq it is a quagmire and Iran is in the hands of ultra-conservatives. Wherever elections have taken place, in countries belonging to the GMEI, Islamic movements have progressed. The U.S., like Europe, continues to reject the notion that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is central and serves as a factor of instability for the region. It is used by Islamic movements who give it a religious connotation in their fight for Jerusalem. Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria: the strong-arming methods used by the major powers to pacify the region have failed tragically." HOFMANN